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OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLE IN RELIGION

"Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.—Eph. ii., 19-22.

There is a very interesting progress of thought in this passage. The negative is substantially an affirmative.

"Ye are no more strangers."

Considering it in a civil aspect, there was nothing that, to the Jew, to the Greek, or to the Roman, could seem more unfortunate than not to have been born a Jew, or a Greek, or a Roman. They felt to a very considerable extent as we do, who feel that to be born an American is the best birth that one can have—for the first time. They had, in other words, an intensity of national thought and feeling which we can now scarcely recognize.

The Jew accustomed himself to divide the whole world into two classes. The first class, and the only one worth anything, was composed of Jews; and all the rest were Gentiles. They were the great miserable part of mankind, that were not born Jews.

The Greeks felt the same way, except that, being more intellectual and more æsthetic, they had a daintiness in their scorn. They also divided the world into two classes—the fortunate people who were Greeks, and the millions and millions of unfortunate people who were barbarians.

And the Romans, afterwards, regarded Roman citizenship as the very top of earthly privilege; and all the rest—the great outside world—to them, likewise, were barbarians. To be a Roman citizen was not simply an honor: it was a prerogative; it was a protection; it was a power.

We find a reference to the intensity of this feeling recorded in the twenty-second chapter of Acts.

"Then the chief captain came, and said unto him [Paul], Tell me, art thou a Roman?"

[1] Sunday Morning, April 2, 1871. Lesson: Luke XXI. Hymns (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 639, 668, 717.

How did he come to ask that question? Paul had been seized, and, without any trial, had been thrown into prison; and in order to extort testimony from him, they made ready to scourge him. And when they had bound him, and were about to lay on the scourge, he turned to the officer, and said,

"Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

"Now, to scourge a *man* would not have been a great sin—manhood went for nothing; but that they were about to scourge a *Roman*, withheld the lash instantly.

"When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman."

Everybody, in the whole civilized world, then stood in awe of that name.

"Then the chief captain came and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born."

No one scene that I know of in Scripture, will show what value and what dignity were put upon citizenship, more than this little incident. When, therefore, the apostle said,

"Ye are no more foreigners and strangers,"

it carried with it a thrill of meaning—although it was so spiritualized that we can scarcely appreciate it.

"Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens."

They were brought up higher; they were ennobled; they were dignified. And this is the figure by which the apostle represents the true elevation which takes place when men have entered into the spirit of religious life in Christ Jesus, and are associated together. They form a new citizenship. They are formed on a higher plane. They enter upon a nobler life.

Then the thought progresses:

"Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

After thinking of them as citizens, the next thought naturally was that citizenship was broken up into families; and the thought of the household was even more precious than that of the state. And then came the thought of a household with God as the Father—the household of God.

Then, from this thought he naturally progresses to that which the household represents. And the world over, the household represents the greatest amount of heart-privilege and of refinement. And the enjoyment of any age may be gauged by the quality of its home-life. It has always been so. It will always be so. The family is the institution which stands next to God—next to the divine pulsation. Here is love-equality. Here is privilege without superstí-

tion. Here is less of the artificial and more of the natural than anywhere else. We come nearer the spontaneous impulse of the soul without imposing ceremonies, and without conventional institutions, and yet with fullness, and reality, and power, in home-life than in any other combination. Nowhere else is there so much of every person's life acting so freely, so strongly, so directly, and so usefully, as in the family.

Therefore, when the Apostle spoke of Christians gathering together in church fellowship, and said, "They are redeemed from the condition of barbarians or Gentiles, as it were, and brought into citizenship," that meant a great deal. And when he said, "They belong to the household of God; they have all the amenities and privileges and preciousness of the intercourse that belongs to the household," he said still more.

In speaking of the household, he naturally thought of the house. And instantly the figure changed into an architectural one.

"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone."

That is, you are built, not on the apostles, and on the prophets, as if they were the foundation; but you are built up with them, so that you stand on the same foundation that they do. Both you and they stand on the divine foundation.

'And are built upon the foundation of the apostles, and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

Nothing was so sacred in the eyes of antiquity as a temple, because private houses were so squalid, relatively. When Athens was the glory of the world, when her marble shone almost like the rays of the sun to one that approached the city, her streets were narrow, her dwellings were small, and all their appointments were mean. And when the apostle would speak of a building that had some circumstance and dignity, he naturally took as an example that which was glorious in the eyes of antiquity—the temple in Jerusalem, the Acropolis in Athens, or the many temples in Rome. The *temple* was the embodiment of beauty, and of sanctity as well. And the apostle said,

"Ye are of the household of God."

And then, in speaking of the building, he cited the temple, because that gave the conception of a glorious structure.

And next he said,

"In whom ye also are builded together for a *habitation* of God through the Spirit."

For the temple then, in his thoughts, was commuted into a dwelling. It was the habitation of God; it was the house; it was the household; it was citizenship.

I do not consider this mixing figures. I consider it a progression of figures, not by any law of outward similarity or suggestion, but by the more subtle evolution of interior thought.

All this refers to the associated life of Christian people, that are become Christ's, that are God's, and that are united together. The apostle does not here so much declare the purposes for which they are united. He rather plays upon the thought of the dignity, the power, and the glory which rested upon men in their religious association. At the earliest period of the history of the Christian church, and even since, Christians drew together for the purposes of mutual support. The Gospel had its first disciples among the poor and ignorant, as we all know; and they really needed to cling to each other. They needed it, not simply for instruction, but preëminently to keep up each other's courage in the life that they were following. For certain exigencies, and during brief periods, it was necessary that there should be a community of goods. It would not have been needful if the earliest followers of Christ had been in circumstances of wealth; but where they were all poor, and where the least change in their condition was liable to throw whole families out of their daily bread, there was reason why they should put their joint-stock at the command of each other. But this never was laid down broadly as a general order of the church. Nor was it perpetuated. It was only an occasional experience. They met, first, in part, for the most economic reasons; but they also associated themselves together because there was no other way of encouraging, helping, and comforting each other in the religious life, so well as on the social principle. It was the social element that first obtained in the Christian church. We have reason to suppose that the Christian church never separated itself from the old Jewish church until after the destruction of Jerusalem. Up to that time the temple was sacred alike to those that were Jews of the strictest sort, and to those that were Christian Jews.

We have almost an exact analogy of this in modern history. When Wesley undertook to reform the Church of England, he did not separate his disciples from the established church; and to the day of his death they did not leave it. They remained in it, and observed its ordinances and rules, at the same time holding separate meetings of their own, over and above those of the church. And the early Christians still adhered to the temple-service, though they had their social gatherings besides, until the city was destroyed, and the temple with it, and they were driven from it. Then they were obliged to frame some other organizations; and they took the synagogue for their pattern, or copied largely from it. And the

circumstances of these organizations varied almost infinitely. There was no prescribed outward form for the church. While they still maintained the established canons and modes of worship of the Jewish church, they met together as Christians aside from the temple-service, because in this way they could kindle in themselves a higher fervor.

It is difficult for single individuals, unless they be very highly endowed, to create in themselves fervor when alone. Now and then there is a nature that can generate its own fire; but ordinarily you must put stick upon stick, and spark to spark, and flame to flame, in order to make fervor. And it is the association of feeling, it is feeling in the multitude, whose thought kindles in each individual the highest forms of emotion. There are very few who have the power of solitary zeal; and there are very few who have not the power of associated zeal. The Christian religion depended at the first, and has ever since depended, and will to the end depend, very largely on worldly conditions. For a religion whose element is love, and not awe; a religion whose very life is sweet and pure emotion, must thrive by the social principle. It never was meant that Christians should be solitary. It never was meant that they should feed themselves. It was meant that they should thrive in their combined and associated capacities.

In church association, also, the feeble and ignorant get from the gifts of all an education which is not possible in any other way. A church that has a real Christian life in it, is one of the best schools to which men can go. If, when the disciples had professed the name of Christ, each one had made his own house the centre, and his own relatives exclusive companions, there would have been hundreds and thousands in the course of time who would have been almost without instruction. But by the gathering together of the humble and lowly with those of culture and refinement in intimate association, the under classes gained, and the upper classes lost nothing. As soon as the idea of brotherhood was once introduced; as soon as men felt that God was their Father, and that Jesus Christ was their elder brother, and that they were all brethren, and they began to come together with that feeling in their hearts, instantly there took place a process of evolution and of education which never can be measured, and which can scarcely be overestimated.

There is an education of the books, and there is an education of the higher forms in schools; but the general education which the community receive depends largely upon the association of men with men. It is the unconscious and general action of the higher natures upon the intermediate or lower, that is perpetually working in

society; therefore, a church that gathers together its members, and has not circulation in it, and has not automatic life in it, and has not the voluntary principle in it, has but little influence; while a church whose members really live, is a powerful moral education to all that belong to it.

It is this that marks the church of the peculiar organization to which we belong. It is a brotherhood. And in one sense—in the sense of rank—all that are in it are equal. There are no priests with us. There are no privileged orders in our church association. We are one family, of which God is the head. The church is itself a household, and all its members are brethren. In that sense they all stand on an equal footing. And of all organizations, this is the best if it is wisely used, while it is the poorest if it is unwisely used.

If there be a true life in the church, if there be a true democratic feeling among the members, if there be a good degree of zeal, if there be a proper familiarity, if there be a sweet and blessed affection, flowing through the church, then the best lives in the church become instructors, and all the poorest lives—the lives of the whole spiritual household—are pervaded by a common public sentiment: the gifts of all belong to each; and the gifts of each belong to all.

For general instruction, then, and for the development of emotive life, it is wise for those that love the Lord Jesus Christ to gather themselves together. It is best that they should instruct by more than their ordinary thought—though that ought to be availed of more than it is. There are many churches in which the pew is a thousand times stronger than the pulpit; and it is a very fortunate circumstance that it is so, provided that it is used. But it seems to me that often more than half of the real power of the church is lost because it is not developed and used. Where, as in many of the churches of the adjacent city, there are scores of men of the highest culture, and of the widest experience, who are fitted by their very professional life for speaking and bearing witness to eminent moral truths, it would seem almost impertinent that the only utterances in the church should be from one man—the pastor. Not that I would undervalue the stated preaching of the Gospel; but I would add to the power of church-life the influence of all those who are fitted to bear testimony and witness in the cause of Christ. I do not exaggerate when I say that not half the power which there is in the church is brought to bear as it should be. But where it is brought to bear to any considerable degree, the effect is wonderful. And it is often the case that in what are called *social meetings*, there is a better proclamation of the Gospel, and spiritual truths are more comprehensively set forth, and there is more emotive power manifested,

and there is more profound testimony borne, than can possibly be the case where there is but one man officiating. With all its imperfections, what an extraordinary wealth there is in the pulpit, the world over! Consider what, since the days of the apostles, has been the amount of truth thrown out upon the world—and almost in one direction—by the Christian pulpit. In antiquity there was nothing like it. When you consider that every Sabbath Day hundreds and thousands of places are opened, where men, equipped and skilled by long use for preaching the Gospel, are pouring streams of moral light and truth upon the community, where is there the parallel of this great work? And if besides this immense power, there were brought to bear all the power which inheres in the laity of the church—its membership—there would, I think, be a pentecostal force added, to exalt the spiritual life of the people.

There is in the association of Christians, also, an opportunity for the development of those emotions and those enjoyments which spring from the service of song, such as there could not be if Christians were scattered, and lived solitarily. The nature of religion must be a nature of emotion. For, although religion employs the reason, it bears to it the same relation that a pair of spectacles bears to the eyes. It is not the eyes. It is merely a help to the eyes. And religion is the heart, and not the understanding. Technically, it is reverential, filial love. And religion, although it helps, is but a help. It is not, therefore, theology that is religion. It is the higher form of heart-emotion that constitutes religion.

Now, this can nowhere else have expression so well as in lyrical poetry. There is no other creed that is like the hymn-book. There never can be such a bond of union as the hymn-book. And the songs of the church, and its regular service, often supplement the church, and sustain it through periods of emergency. Sometimes where the pulpit is weak they are strong, and hold the church on in spite of the weakness of the instruction of the pulpit. They give utterance to thoughts that otherwise could never be spoken. Many can chant what they cannot speak. Many and many a one can sing (with tears dropping, and, as it were, beating time) joys or aspirations which no language other could frame. I like to think of love as the center of religion, and of song as its best utterance.

The mother singing over the cradle—is there any other saintliness more beautiful to be thought of than that? The old bird sits on the tree, and coaxes the young bird to fly to her. She sings to it, and teaches it to sing. And the mother sits at the cradle, as it were, to call the little children up to the Christian life. The children sing in the family, and in the utterance of song they are

all one. There is but one sound, but one hymn, and, to a large extent, so far as there is feeling at all, it is one feeling. And persons are never brought into such communion as when they are gathered together, and their feelings express themselves in song. It is the hymns that persons sing together that unite them. I think I love those that I have sung with better than any others. And when we come into heavenly places in Christ Jesus—into the lecture-room and the church proper—and all join in singing, is there any other ministration in the sanctuary that opens the gate of heaven so quickly, and makes the battlements shine so brightly? Is there any other service that so brings to our thought the radiant inhabitants of the other side? Is there any other service that seems to bow and bend the heavens so near to us, and that awakens thoughts of dear ones that have gone away from us so quickly, as songs of Zion? Is there anything which so makes doctrines seem no longer cant, by clothing them with life and beauty; which so makes theology like an orchard, in which stands the tree of life dropping down Christian fruit? Since the church was organized, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, have been among the peculiar experiences of the church; but I think that we have not fully entered upon those experiences yet. The millennial service of song will put all that we have had in the background. The time will come when whole congregations will chant the Psalms of David, and when they will thus be touched with the profoundest and divinest mysteries, almost as spontaneously as birds warble their Spring songs. The time has not come yet, but the time will come. At present, song is in bondage—sometimes to singing-masters, sometimes to classic music, sometimes to pedantic instruments, sometimes to one thing, and sometimes to another. Just now, it is in danger of going into bondage to taste. We all must have things exquisite. Everything must be carried to the highest pitch of refinement. Nothing will do which has not the signet and sign of the utmost culture. I like culture so long as it is humble, so long as it regards itself as the servant of the truth. But I love the heart; and I would rather hear an old cracked voice, feebie, with many gaps, singing honestly with tears the songs of Zion, than hear the finest cantatrice that ever enraptured the most cultivated congregation. And although there is to be taste and beauty in song, if possible, yet, if anything is to be sacrificed, it is taste and beauty. The inside, the world over, against the outside! The soul against the body! The external goes down to let the internal out.

I would not be understood as undervaluing taste and beauty in song, as you know I do not, by the history of this church, where there has been so much done to promote growth and admirableness

of song; but that is always to be subordinate to the soul. The moment you begin to sing for concert effects, and to feel that nothing will do but the most exquisite style of music, that moment song goes into Babylon. That moment it is in bondage. For it is the minister of joy to the heart. It is the minister of peace. It is that which gives voice to rapture and hope. It is love. It is fellowship. It is triumph in the Lord Jesus Christ. Song is the wing by which we rise higher, with easier beats, than by any other ministration of the sanctuary. And where can you get it as you find it in Christian households? Where can you get it as you find it in Christian assemblies? What has given song to the world more than anything else, is not bacchanalian debauch, is not wild and sparkling gatherings of men for pleasure: it is the soul that sings of immortality. It is the soul that sings of love and gratitude. That has given the world more inspiration of music than all other things put together. And sacred song is yet to rule—as it ought to. And if song is to rule, we must remember that it must be the heart that sings, and not the voice nor taste alone. Taste, voice, everything; but the heart first.

So, too, associated Christian life gives opportunity to help those that need help. If one has the good fortune of education, and of original balance and endowment, and is able to govern himself, he may not need any exterior help; but that is no reason why he should scorn those that do need it. If one is surrounded, in business, and at home, by all the restraints that he needs, that is no reason why he should not associate himself with those who do need other restraints than those which belong to their private spheres in life. And one of the functions of the church is to take care of its members. It does do it to a certain degree; but it is yet in the wilderness. It is imperfectly doing its work; and the ideal church puts to shame the real church. There are a thousand ways in which the church, by stimulation and restraint, holds back men, and helps them to be more religious; and yet it falls short in this respect.

These were some of the reasons that acted to gather the church together; and they are reasons that exist still, and will exist to the end of time. The church is founded, therefore, not upon any external command; and not upon any arbitrary principle of obedience are we to maintain church life. The reasons for it are inherent in human nature. The desirableness of the church does not lie in its sanctions, or in its ordinances, or in its historical elements, but in the life which is developed in it.

Because I resent the oppression of the external church, I would not be understood as not believing in the reality of a true spiritual interior church. Because I say that no man shall impose upon me,

as by divine authority, ordinances that I know are not imperative; because I aver that no man shall presume to say to me, "You are not in the church," when I do not happen to be in the fold which he likes best; because I will not, for one single moment, wink at the despotism of any ecclesiastical organization; because I say that the outside matters pertaining to the church are all of them of human invention, I should be sorry to have any suppose that I deny the existence of the church itself. That is not of human invention. The coming together of those that are rich in the direction of a common love, and their acting under the inspiration of a common spiritual feeling; the coming together of those that are making fight for the same life, under the same banner, and with the same hopes and fears—the coming together of such persons in a real household, is natural in the highest sense of the word. It springs from necessities that are organic in man; that are created in him; that are natural to him.

It is not because the word went out eighteen hundred years ago, *Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together*, that I desire to be united with others in Christian life. It is because my heart calls out for other hearts that are congenial to it. It is because every one who has learned to love Christ truly, loves his brother, and longs for fellowship with his brother. I see in myself, and in you; I see in that which is the best part of me, and the best part of you; I see in our joy, in our faith, in our holy sympathy one with another; I see in our common labors among man—I see in all these things, the foundations of church-life. And I believe in the church, not because the apostles started it, but because God made men so that they cannot live in any other way than in fellowship. That is a foundation that is deeper than any other; and it is a foundation on which the church exerts a more potent influence than it could if it were on any other foundation.

I do not set myself against ecclesiastical establishments for those that want them. If a man wants to go into the Episcopal Church, and wants to observe days, forms and ceremonies, and wants to adopt its whole ritual, I have no objection. I respect that church. I have a thousand reasons for doing so. And though I do not need it myself, I would not say a word, nor make a gesture, to offend any one to whom it is sacred. It is only when the stately bishop comes to the door of that church and says, "We are the people, and wisdom shall die with us—pass on, outsider," that I have any fault to find. But then I raise my protest; and I say to him, "I respect your liberty to worship Christ in your own way, but you never had delegated to you the power to cast me out. It was God, and not

you, that called me ; and God keeps me ; and I am his disciple just as much as you are. And where two or three of us are gathered together, there is Christ in the midst of us—and I do not care if there is not a bishop, if Christ will come."

I do not undertake to say that you shall not have orders in the ministry, if you want them. You may have a deacon ; you may have a priest ; you may have a bishop ; you may have a cardinal ; you may have a pope. I accord that liberty to all. If they choose to organize themselves so, I have nothing to say. It is not that men do it for themselves that I complain of, but that they arrogate superiority over every body else, and over everything else, and that they profess to have the kingdom of God, and the whole of it in themselves ; nay, that they claim to have certain golden channels that run clear back to the river of life, and that there is not a drop issuing out from under the throne of God that does not run through their channels. It is when men make these extravagant pretensions, and set up these preposterous claims, in regard to the external church—the poorest part of the Church (for much of it is nothing but bark, and not living bark at that)—it is then that I set myself against it, and declare the liberty of the spirit as against the bondage of forms.

Men sometimes think that I disown baptism. I do not. I put it on the divine ground. I use it, not because it is commanded, but because of the value which I see in it. I use it, not because of any authority which makes it binding, but because I think that it is a help to men in their religious life.

I say that the Lord's Supper is not obligatory in the same sense that the High Church people think it is. The principle on which I use it is deeper and stronger than that which they urge. I use it because there is a living principle in human nature which demands it. The crying out of the soul for it is more than the imposition of it by a stiff and hard law.

Men say, "We must have something fixed." You have something fixed. God is fixed. The soul is fixed. Its strifes upward are fixed. These things are more fixed than any dogmas or ordinances of the church can be. Men seem to think that we are all at sea and afloat, but there is no such stability as belongs to life itself. I put the soul-life against the external bodily life. I put the interior spirit against these externalities. I oppose myself to the bishop only when he is arrogant and encroaches upon my liberty. I set myself against the pope only when he attempts to be *my* pope. I do not want him. I am pope enough for myself! I set myself against neither bishop nor pope, when they are my brethren. I can

take the bread from that dearly beloved man, Bishop Huntington, or from that venerable and excellent man, Bishop Potter, with the utmost delight—nay, with reverence.

Do I see men that have spent themselves for Christ, and do not you suppose that I know their worth, and love them? I love to look up to people. I wish there were more that I could look up to! I have no repugnance in that direction. It is only when men assume authority that I draw back from them. There is the point. We are all Christlike, in my view, if we love each other. If you are my brother, love me. If you are my brother, we are knit together. I will follow as long as it is love that leads; but the moment that any man begins to be the monarch, giving law with authority, that moment, with all the allegiance which I bear to Christ, I defy him, saying, "I am a Christian man, and a man in Christ Jesus is free."

And yet, the imagination of men has been stained through and through with these claims. I do not wonder at it. But we will get it out of the world before long. There is the notion, that to be of any account a thing must have a certain straight, rigid order, a certain succession. Well, is it so? Is it not true that the dearest, the most influential, and the most permanent things are those which have no such fixity and necessity of external order?

Here is a group gathered together in the family; but they never heard father nor mother say, "My son, have you ever considered that it was your duty to fall in love? I enjoin you, by all the principles of fidelity, to go somewhere and fall in love with somebody." Does not the spontaneous need of the heart take care of that, without any parental exhortation? When two natures are fitted to each other (though they are not always so well fitted) does not the nature in them interpret all that is necessary? Not even language is needful. The ten thousandth part of a look speaks louder than trumpets. And when the life of true love kindles, do they need to say to each other, "Now we ought to go before a magistrate and tell him it is begun?" Do we need such external relationships in matters of this kind? Does not the heart brood? Are not silence and secretiveness a part of the original nature of a delicate and true beginning of love? And, at last, the promise and the pledge are interchanged and fulfilled, and the household is founded, and the life thrives, and burdens are all winged, moving so easily that even sorrows begin to have shining plumes about their neck; then all the life is singing through the household, though there is poverty, it is blessed poverty, and there are content and joy with it. And as, little by little, the population of the household increases, and the father grows proud, and the mother grows justly proud, is there

any other pride so noble as theirs? Is there any pride to be compared with that of loving parents, in each other and in their children? Is there any other gratitude so deep as that of parents' hearts which they give for healthy and virtuous children, and children that are brought up, at last, safe? If there is anything else so deep as that, I do not know what it is.

Well, life flows on. The hair of the parents is turning gray. There have been some little imperfections; there have been here and there cloudy days of experience; yet in the main the life has gone through happily. The children have settled down in spheres of usefulness. And at last they follow the mother to the grave. And as they return to their house they are met at the door by one who draws a contrast between their condition and his. "I live," he says, "in a house that has been in our family three hundred years. You have been living in a house that has no antiquity, no nothing to it. I am the son of Timothy, and he was the son of Jacob, and he was the son of Peter; and I can trace my lineage back to the flood. And my wife is of that other old family; and you can trace her relationship all the way up. And we have lived in the greatest consideration of all the historic circumstances of our descent. We have had everything in our house fixed and right." Do you not suppose that the close sympathy and loving heart-life of the humbler family is worth all the pomp and circumstance of mere antiquity of family?

Now, far be it from me to say that if a man has love and virtue, and the power of joy, it is not a good thing for him to have, also, honorable connections, running away back on the father's and mother's side. And far be it from me to say that where one is cultured, and has the facility for enjoying such things, it is not a good thing to have a mansion, in a park, with all delightful circumstances. If you can have them both, it is better than to have either alone; but if you are going to separate them, which is regent, which is to take the precedence, heart-life without external circumstances, or external circumstances without heart-life?

Now, I hold that in church-life men may justly feel proud if they can trace back their church-forms. I should be very glad to trace church-forms back to the apostles just as we have them here in Plymouth Church; and I think that by exercising a little ingenuity I could trace back a great many things a good ways. I think we have almost everything the apostles had. In the apostolic church they had men that were not worthy of the name of Christ, and so have we in our church. They had men that were stingy, and so have we. They had many ignorant people, and so have we. They had fault-finders, and so have we. We have many of the apostolic seals. I see it

as plainly as can be, though I am not, perhaps, as proud of it as I might be.

The peculiarity of tracing back the congregational church, is that it has no form. It is the gathering together, without external form (or with as little external form as possible) of those that are brought, by elective affinity, into association with each other, in one place, where they worship together in one way. And I have no objection to any Episcopal communion tracing itself back as far as England. There is no harm in taking an old house to pieces and building a new house out of the materials of the old. And if our Episcopal Church is formed from the elements of the Church of England, it is no worse for that. And it would be a matter of some antiquarian pleasure to trace it back to England, and, similarly, for the Church of England to find its source in the older Roman hierarchy. I do not object to persons having a love for such things. All I say is, that they are incidental and collateral.

I like to see swallows build nests under the roof of my house in the country—and they do; but if there were not a swallow on the premises, my home would be about the same interiorly as it is now.

I like to see the clematis climb about the doors of my house—and it does. I like to plant vines and bushes about my dwelling. They make it sweeter and more delightful. I never open my window in summer, that a hundred flowers do not send in their airy thanks to me. But give me my inside life; give me my companions in the household, and if there were not a flower on all the lawn, nor a vine on all the building, it would be home to me still.

I am not iconoclastic. I do not set my face against any sect. I do not complain of the Quaker for his barrenness, nor of the Episcopalian for his floridness, nor of the Presbyterian for his rigidity and authority. I stand and say: "I accord the utmost liberty to you, but you shall not attempt to compress me into your forms. I will be free; and I affirm that my freedom is as legitimate as yours." If there is a way in which you are satisfied that you thrive best, thrive in that way; and as this is the way in which we thrive best, we will thrive in this way. But you shall not say that I ignore the church, or destroy the foundations of church life, because I say that the foundations of the church are in the heart, and not outside, in buildings, or ordinances, or government, or theological dogmas.

The reasons, then, why I call men into church association, are reasons that are far more powerful, I think, than those which operate in the hierarchial churches, if I may call them so. But to say to a man, "You shall join the church because it is the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, is presenting the idea of authority in the most

barren, and to me the most offensive way. The command of Christ I find in *you*, and not in history. I can find no explicit command of this kind in the whole of the four Gospels. I can find in the apostolic writings an implication of already existing principles of association; I can find incidental allusions to gatherings of Christians as being already established; but nowhere can I find a specific command to organize a church; nor any command as to how it is to be organized; nor one single hint that there is an external or legal obligation on that subject. Where is the obligation? If anywhere, inside. If not there, nowhere.

Men and brethren, have we come to such a miserable condition that we cannot understand that a thing may be obligatory upon us, though it is not a matter of fixed law? Is there anything known in the statute of the land which requires, when I meet a lady, that I shall take off my hat? And yet, would I meet a lady, if I were in my senses, without paying some respect to her? And is there any law that could make me do it as quick as I would do it without a law?

If you know that your neighbor is sick, do you need a law to tell you to go and minister to his wants? Is there not that in you which makes you feel that it is your duty to do it? Do not the instincts of manhood move you quicker than any human enactment? Laws for those that need laws; but the moment that a man is so quick and sensitive that he follows spiritual necessity and influence promptly and truly, that moment he can do without the law what other people have to do by the law. And when a man does right without being goaded to it, he does it better than he would if he had to be goaded to it. When a man is a law to himself, he stands on a higher plane than when he needs to be restrained by humanly enacted laws. I do not mean that a man is to be a law unto himself in the sense of throwing off external law. The apostle says,

"Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty as an occasion to the flesh."

You are called to liberty; but it is a liberty to go higher and not lower. It is a liberty to enjoy the blessings of a higher life, and not a license to enter upon all sorts of indulgences.

The ground, then, on which I ask persons to join the church, is primarily this: that they are to be united to the Lord Jesus Christ. I appeal to the highest form of reason, and to the highest form of moral sense, and ask, Is there any man that lives who can possibly, for one single moment, standing out of the bewilderment of controversy, deny that he is under obligation to be faithful, if not to any other creature in the universe, at least to Him that loved him, and

gave himself for him? I say that the dearest name on earth, to you, ought to be the name that your father loved, the name that your mother worshipped, and the name that filled your childhood with wholesome awe and reverence. And because it is unnatural for you not to be united in faith, and hope, and love, and obedience, to your God, I call upon every man to enter upon a Christian life—that is, upon a personal union with Christ. I call upon you to open your soul so that the divine influence shall find entrance to you, and give you inspiration, and a spiritual perception of what is seemly, and just, and of good report. I call upon every man to enter upon a Christian life from the highest considerations—those of fidelity; those of fealty; those of love and gratitude to God.

And when you have begun to live a Christian life, your soul will tell you why you ought to come into church association. You will find Christian life easier then. You will find sympathy. And others who have had doubts will be helped by your experience. Oftentimes the experience of one man clears the path of another man.

I call you into church fellowship, then, not because there is an external law that says you must go into the church, but because in church-fellowship you will live happier, more easily, and upon a higher level; because the public sentiment that surrounds you will be a mighty tide that will buoy you up. I call you to church-fellowship for reasons that inhere in your own experience, and in your own profit. Do you love Christ? Then you should love Christ's children. Do you love your father and mother? and do you hate your brother and sister?

"Well but," says one, "I do not feel that I am worthy." If you mean by that that you are conscious that you are living in the commission, secretly or openly, of practices that are disallowed by morality, and that are abhorrent to religion, then my reply to your objection is, Forsake evil, and learn to do well, and still press forward in a Christian life, and with the Christian church. But if you mean that you have not attained to that condition of spiritual excellence of which you have a conception, my reply is, that you are like a school-boy who hangs about the school-house door, saying, "I am afraid to go in. I do not think I know enough to go to school." What is a school for? Is it for knowing boys, or for ignorant boys?

The church is a curative institution. It is an educating institution. Like every household, it has something of everything in it. And because you are not worthy is one reason why you should be in the church.

"O well," many say, "I fear that I shall not be able to maintain all the duties and obligations that rest on a Christian." There is not

a duty nor an obligation that rests on a Christian, that does not rest on you. There is not a single duty that will be incumbent upon you when you go into the church, that is not incumbent upon you now. Is there any obligation greater than this: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself?* And does that rest on you when you go into the church any more than it did before? From the day that you were born, almost; from the time that you were old enough to discern your right hand from your left, that obligation has rested upon you. And that is the great obligation, transcending all others, which will rest upon you when you go into the church. It rests upon you whether you are in the church or out of it.

It is a shame for you to be a sinning man; it is a shame for you to be an un-God-fearing man; it is a shame for you to fritter away your time; it is a shame for you to refuse allegiance to God. You treat him with dishonor. You treat him as you would not treat your neighbor. You would be ashamed to do by a fellow-man what you are not ashamed to do by your God. And I appeal to you, by all that is honorable and all that is right-minded in you, to begin a higher life, and to begin it in association with others that are attempting to do the same thing.

If *you* think you will fail, *I* think you will fail. I never knew a man that did not fail. Yet the motto is, "Cast down but not destroyed." If you stumble and fall, get up again. You are like men journeying, part of the time through a morass, and part of the time up rugged hills, and part of the time in thickets that tear them. And it is not for you to insist that you will not walk a Christian life unless you can be in the king's highway, and unless you can keep yourself intact. And I call you into the church that you may be more profited in it than you can be out of it. I call you to a church life because you need it.

Do you say, "I have all the restraints that I need"; or, "I do not need this inspiration"? Do you say, "My house is better than any other place. I can sit at home on Sunday; I can read sermons; I can look out on the bay; I can wander in the forests; I can make a better use of my time than by going to that miserable little village church, and hearing a humdrum sermon which does not do me any good"? That is the way you have begun to live a life of love, is it?

Here is a man who has an income of fifty thousand dollars; and he is living in a village where there is not a man who gets more than a dollar a day. There is trouble and poverty and sickness all about him; but he stays at home and says, "I find more comfort

in my house than in going to these squalid cottages. I have to go and take supper with these poor people, and mumble their miserable crusts; and I do not like it."

What do you think of that for a benevolent man, who stays at home because it is pleasanter there? He is so favored and fortunate that he thinks it his duty to be selfish! There is many a man who is so dainty that he says, "I am not going to mix with common church-people." There is fellowship for you! You are so well cultured, you are so far developed in the spiritual life, that you are able to minister to yourself; and so you say, "I am not going into fellowship with those that are below me." There are thousands of men who need what you can give them—your example and your sympathy. They need to be made to feel that men who are higher in life than they, do not feel above them. But if men like you were obedient to the Scripture injunction, *Condescend to men of low estate*, their fellow-men all through the community would be greatly comforted, and lifted far up toward heaven. If you know you can get along yourself, do not forget that there are others who need much assistance in getting along.

If you were a prince, and were riding in a gilded carriage, and you saw a peasant's brat suffering by the road-side, it would be becoming in you to stop and take the miserable creature in, and let it ride; and if the mother were there faint and weary, it would be becoming in you to take her in also. It might soil your coach, and it might disgust your servants; but was ever a kingly coach put to a better use than that of carrying God's poor? If you are as much better as you think, humility would make you better yet; and sympathy would make you still better. And you who do not think that you need the church, remember that there are dying men who need you.

Besides, there is another thing. I do not think one ought to sail under false colors. You are a moral man, and a kind man; and wherever you are known in all your neighborhood, the impression is that you will not go into the church. And men, comparing you with persons in the church who are not as good as you are, come to think that morality makes better men than the church does. So you are bearing false witness. They say, "There is a man who has not religion," and yet, you secretly have religion. For you go to the same throne of grace that I do. You read from the same Bible that I do. You have the same belief and hope that I have. It is from God that you get the oil which makes your lamp burn; and men do not glorify God, but they glorify you. Pointing to you, and to others, they say, "That man has

morality, and these men have spirituality and are church members, but he lives a more exemplary life than they do." There may be a hundred reasons for this discrepancy which they do not know, and which you do not know. The ignorance of those men, their temptations, and the troubles and trials of their business, may all conspire to make it difficult for them to be consistent Christians. And it ought not to be supposed that their imperfections are the fault of the church or of religion. And I hold that if a man is living by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, he ought somehow and somewhere to let it be known. He ought to confess the source of his inspiration. If you are enabled to resist temptation, and Christ enables you to do it, you ought to confess it before the world somehow or other. If you are living a noble and pure life, and it is Christ that enables you to live such a life, you ought to acknowledge it among men. If heaven is the source from which you are deriving your life and strength, oh! let men know where you get medicine, and where you dig gold, that they, too, may have the same recourse. Do not bear false witness. Do not leave men to think that you owe to morality what you are secretly receiving from God.

I shaped this sermon for two reasons: partly because, having had occasion, in some sermons lately, to speak of the bondage of externalities at the expense of the interior life, I do not want to have it thought that I undervalue church-life and church-fellowship; and partly because there are many in this congregation who ought to make a public profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many of you who are living lives of prayer; there are many of you who are redeemed from death by the power of faith; there are many of you who only need to take the step of entering upon a declared Christian life. And I feel that the time has come for you to do it. Many of you ought to say to your children, "I am a Christian man." There are many of you whose children need to hear you say it. There are many of you that have neighbors who would be greatly edified and strengthened if you were to array yourself with God's people. If you were to take that step, you do not know how many you would draw after you. If a river-boom breaks away, trunk after trunk, branch after branch, refuse of every description, that has been collecting for weeks, and months, and perhaps years—the whole raft goes after it. And there are men who stand like a boom in the community. One man backs up against another, and there they remain until the obstruction is removed. And there are men in this congregation who, if they would honestly and openly avouch the name of Jesus Christ, and publicly

bear witness to their faith in him, by uniting with the brethren here, would bring in scores and scores with them.

The first Sabbath in May is coming. It is always a Sabbath celebrated as memorable among us; it is a flower-day. There is not another Sunday of the year that is such a Sunday of ingathering as that. It is very precious to many families. Some of you have saints in heaven that come into this church on the first Sunday of May; the memory is sweet to you; and you would like to have all your other children come in on that Sunday, because it brings the living and the departed so nearly together. It is a beautiful and crystaline day in this church. It is going, this year, to be a crowded Sabbath; and many of you ought to come in. Your objections are not worthy of longer delay. It seems to me that your impulses, so long suppressed, ought to bear you forward, that your sense of duty ought to be fulfilled, that you ought to join your strength to the strength of your brethren, and in the presence of them all avouch the Lord Jehovah to be your God, and Jesus Christ to be your Saviour, and the Holy Spirit to be your Sanctifier.

The time is short. We are admonished by one and another that are taken. One peg after another, and one cord after another, of the tent, is snapped, or is drawn out of the sand, and very soon this tabernacle shall be taken down, and we shall all give place to others. Another generation is crowding us; and what you do you must do quickly. If among you there are any who have neglected their opportunities for many years, let them bear in mind that if they serve Christ, they must begin at once for they have but a little time left.

Fathers, for your children's sake, for your own sake, and for Christ's sake, I pray you, come into the fellowship of Christ and the brotherhood. Mothers, of all in the world, ought not to set such an example to their children as will shipwreck them. I pray you, bring the sweet offering of a grateful and regenerate heart, and lay it on the altar of the Lord. Young men, maidens, all that hope for salvation through Jesus Christ, for a victorious death and a triumphant resurrection, I invoke you to gather yourselves together into the fellowship of love, into the brotherhood of saints, into the household of God.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Thou that dost guide our thoughts, and inspire our feelings, grant unto us now that inward light and inspiration by which we shall pray for the things which we need, as we ought. We thank thee that we are supplied; that from thine open hand our outward life is maintained; that we are given sufficient strength and skill to maintain from day to day all our outward relations, and to supply our wants. We thank thee that thou hast put within the reach of our own powers the fruit of affection, and that we gather from all the amenities and associations of the household the blessings of love. We rejoice that there is something better than food for the body, or even for the ordinary affections, and that we may rise together into a realm yet higher, to meet thee, to find ourselves the citizens of a better country, members of a nobler household—even the household of God.

Oh! how little do we know of this upper life and realm! How little do we know of the things that are within our reach! How little do we know of the things which are beyond our ordinary grasp! It is thy Spirit that maketh intercession through us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

We pray for the mediation and the help of the divine Spirit in us, so that we may not only ask the things which we consciously need, but may learn to ask the unknown things which we need more than the known. We pray that thou wilt grant unto us intimacy, fellowship, life, day by day—life hidden in thine, that all the sources of our life may be in God, in whom we live and have our being. We pray for the forgiveness of our sins. We pray for a heart set free from a life of sin. We pray that we may have evidence in us that by thy blessed help we are from day to day overcoming easily besetting sins; that we are strong against evil; that we are powerful to resist temptation, and to subdue it.

And we beseech of thee, O Lord! that thou wilt grant unto us more and more to grow into the image of God; that we may find in ourselves the likeness of our Father more and more clearly coming out. We pray that we may be strengthened in all that is good, and that goodness in us may take on higher and higher forms from day to day. And as the time is drawing near when we must lay aside these mortal bodies; as all things which minister to them are growing less and less of account to us, grant that we may have evidence that we have a life with God, and that we are preparing for the fellowship of the higher life in heaven. More and more may invisible treasure begin to have value with us. More and more may we live by faith. May we be blessed by hope. May we have a holy fear, looking unto things which are reserved,—unto that rest which remaineth unto the people of God. And while we are not to ask that we may be set free from these mortal bodies, and the duties that are now incumbent upon us, yet may we have a gladness of heart; may we anticipate with holy joy the time when we shall be free from the body, and from its temptations, and from its burdens, and from its sorrows, and from its sufferings, and shall rise and be as the angels of God. We pray that unto this communion, unto these holy hopes and aspirations, all they may be brought who are dear to us. May all our households become households of faith. May all those whom we are associated with in daily business, have in them the beginnings of this higher life. Grant that everywhere we may be able to carry out the fruit of a true piety, in all gentleness, in all humility, in all honor and fidelity, so that men, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven.

We pray for all that are in trouble. Whatever it may be, we commend them to thy succor, and to thy comforting spirit. We pray for all that are

burdened and vexed with worldly things. And we beseech of thee that as their day is, their strength may be also. And may they not be led by temptation, nor by any pressure, out of the straight and narrow way.

We pray for all those who are endeavoring to build up thy cause and thy kingdom. May they have grace given them to do it wisely. And not only grant that they may be able to speak the words of truth, but grant that they may be able, in their daily life and conversation, to bear out the testimony of Christ more perfectly than by word or by doctrine.

We pray for the poor, for the outcast, for the neglected, for the vicious, for the criminal, for all that are in jails and in prisons, for all that are in hospitals, for all that are in asylums, for all that are not gathered, but that wander in the ways of wickedness and license. We beseech of thee that thou wilt grant that there may be more and more effort for the ingathering of the wandering sheep. Bring them back to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

We pray, to-day, that all who are gathered together in thy name may find thee in the midst of them. Fulfill thy most gracious promises to them all. Grant that there may be more and more strength given to feeble Churches. More and more may their wants be supplied by able men, ministering in thy name. Spread abroad the light of truth; spread abroad the hope of the Gospel; spread abroad the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, until all nations shall know thee, and thy name shall be honored in all the earth, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and righteousness shall abide forever. And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Command thy blessing, our heavenly Father, upon the word spoken. Grant that it may go forth with a sacred leaven from on high, and that it may work in the thoughts and feelings of every one of thy creatures. Sanctify to us the privileges of our earthly estate. We rejoice in thy Church. We rejoice in this great spiritual, invisible, glorious communion with thy saints. We rejoice that from our childhood we knew of it, and felt its power. We thank thee for the preciousness of its associations, and for the preciousness of the experience which we have had in connection with it. Where is there such love as that which we have formed in thy Church? We rejoice in it, and pray that it may carry with it more divine power. And may the earth at last feel its influence, and be filled with thy glory. We ask it for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

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